

Known as the “Viper of Mino,” Saito Dosan was renowned for his ruthless tactics. His defeat of Oda Nobuhide (1510–1551) at the Battle of Kanoguchi in 1547 brought him national recognition. After the battle, Dosan’s daughter, Nohime (1533~35–1612), and Nobuhide’s son Oda Nobunaga (1534–1582) were married as part of the peace treaty negotiations.

By 1556, Dosan found himself surrounded by speculation concerning who would be made his heir. Some rumors claimed that his firstborn, Saito Yoshitatsu (1527–1561), was not his natural son; others suggested that Dosan was considering his more talented son-in-law, Oda Nobunaga as his heir. Aware of the doubts about his paternity and determined to secure his position as rightful heir, Yoshitatsu killed his two siblings and attacked his father at the Battle of Nagaragawa in 1556.

Yoshitatsu was able to rally the majority of the Saito clan samurai to himself and defeated his 62-year-old father in a one-sided battle. Nobunaga sent reinforcements to aid his father-in-law, but they arrived after the battle had already ended. Dosan’s head, taken during battle, was interred in the Dosanzuka head mound near Sofukuji temple north of Gifu Castle.